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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the view that the decline in the work ethic would be stronger in the Mount Druitt area west of Sydney, Australia, where unemployment is prominent in the community and the "dole-bludger" stereotype is correspondingly rife. (A "dole-bludger" cheats the system and is considered a parasite on the community.) The study described ideas students have about work and unemployment and discussed the consequences of such attitudes for those young people who must one day cope with unemployment. Twenty-four students from each of the three Mount Druitt high schools and 24 from each of two contrast schools were involved in a structured interviews. (These students were a subsample of approximately 650 Year 9 students who had participated in the Mount Druitt Longitudinal Study.) Results indicated that Mount Druitt students differed very little from their counterparts in the contrast schools. In fact, Mount Druitt students demonstrated higher work motivation, that is, they were more likely to choose a poorly paid job they did not like over the dole. The students demonstrated high motivation to obtain employment after completion of school and had high expectations of success. Students' responses indicated that the attitudes held about unemployment and the dole tended to be more extreme than expected in light of their encounters with unemployed people. The negative view of unemployment and the dole suggested serious consequences for the self-esteem and motivation of the students who must inevitably face unemployment. (The interview schedule is appended.) (YLB)

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MT. DRUITT LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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"I'm not a dole-bludger!"

Attitudes of Yr 9 Sydney High School Students towards Work, Unemployment and the Dole.

Jenny Barltrop
February, 1988

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BACKGROUND TO THE MOUNT DRUITT LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Macquarie University School of Education has been involved in the Mt. Druitt area west of Sydney since 1979. At that time, Mt. Druitt was identified by all the social and welfare agencies as one of the most socially disadvantaged areas in N.S.W. In the same year, funds were made available from the Bernard van Leer Foundation to commence systematic educational intervention at the preschool level in five of the neighbourhoods of Mt. Druitt. The intervention programs were designed to achieve, amongst other aims, a bridging of the educational achievement gap supposed to occur between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those not considered disadvantaged. As the children moved from the preschools into Kindergarten, the intervention programs were extended into this first year of formal schooling, with a later extension in 1979 into the first grade.

Since that time, the Study has been involved in ongoing assessment of educational achievement, attitudes and classroom behaviour of these children through tests, questionnaires and observation. Teacher and parent interviews have also been conducted. In 1985, the N.S.W. Department of Education took over the financial responsibility for the continuation of the project.

As one of the major objectives of the original intervention programs was to reduce or eliminate the hypothesised achievement gap, it was necessary to introduce groups of children into the study who, in comparison to the Mt. Druitt children, were relatively free of disadvantage, so that the Mt. Druitt children's progress could be compared to that of others.

In 1987, a total of 645 students were involved in the study as follows:

Mt. Druitt School 1	-	211 students
Mt. Druitt School 2	-	187 students
Mt. Druitt School 3	-	169 students
Contrast School 1 - Middle S.E.S. Near Sydney	-	46 students
Contrast School 2 - Middle S.E.S. Distant from Sydney	-	32 students

INTRODUCTION

It is a widely held assumption that the increase in youth unemployment witnessed in Australia over the last decade or so, can be attributed primarily to a decline in the value placed upon work by youth. People are beginning to question whether the traditional work ethic still exists at all amongst the young. Holbrook and Bessant (1987) note that "even when unemployment is at its worst, the conviction holds that there is 'work' for those who really want it" (p43). McLean (1978) comments that "old adages about 'pulling your oar as a member of society' or 'by the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread' are not very telling these days" (p28). He claims that "there are signs that the younger generation have a different attitude towards work and being out of work ... (They) are less materialistic, more concerned with the immediate and far less embued with the work/success ethic ... and so the 'dole' is adequate for them ... (it) gives them freedom of action to enjoy their fun scene ..." (p25).

Certainly such a view has commonly been presented by the media. "School Leavers Lack 'Work Ethic' ... Many school leavers have the wrong attitude to work ..." was one headline which appeared in the Daily Mirror on November 9th, 1987. Windschuttle (1979) argues that in the late 1970s there began a "long, persistent and loud campaign waged by the news-media against the 'dole-bludgers' of the community" (p155). This campaign helped to propogate the widespread belief that many young people were cheating the system and living as parasites on the community.

Similarly, employers have often been very critical of young people's attitude towards work (King, 1981). Windschuttle (1979) gives the example of one employer's contribution to the N.S.W. Premier's Conference on Youth

Unemployment, 1977. He "said there was a general impression ... that youth had adopted the following characteristics: a) unreliability, lack of proper education, opposition to commitment; b) deep-seated protest against the need to work ... c) the employer, the government, everybody, owes him a living" (p53).

Further, one of the most common ideas among criminalogists is that delinquency stems from the abandonment of the work ethics (Agnew, 1984). They claim that adolescents are no longer willing to engage in hard work. "The teenage culture is hedonistic and irresponsible, and teenagers reject such values as hard work, thrift, study and self-denial" (p337). Various studies concerning young people's beliefs and attitudes towards work and unemployment, however, yield results which demonstrate attitudes entirely contradictory to those being promoted, suggesting that such allegations made by the press and employers are grounded in popular myth, and have little empirical support.

King (1981) in a review of recent Australian research in the area concluded that "i) work is seen as important by Australian youth, and is relatively attractive to them for reasons other than financial remuneration; ii) unemployment is viewed negatively by Australian youth, and work is more attractive" (p50).

Harris (1985) found, in contrast to the assumption that school leavers are encouraged to go on the dole by the financial incentive that it represents, that the majority of young people view a job, even any job, as preferable to the dole. In fact, as Windschuttle (1979) asserts, "Young unemployed people, contrary to popular prejudice, make greater efforts to

find work than do unemployed adults" (p56). Similarly, Buchholz (1978) shows that young people are actually more work-ethic oriented than older people.

In spite of all this evidence to the contrary, it seems that even young people themselves have succumbed to the notion that the main cause of youth unemployment is that young unemployed people don't want to work. The majority of young people appear to be living out the contradiction of simultaneously rejecting such a view to be a possible picture of themselves at some future time, yet believing it to be generally true of their unemployed peers.

Feather (1983) in a study of causal attributions and beliefs about work and unemployment amongst adolescents, found that students had high expectations about obtaining employment and saw work as attractive, yet at the same time gave the most important reasons for unemployment as lack of effort, lack of interest, lack of education and poor appearance.

As Feather notes, this result is consistent with the actor-observer effect in causal attributions (Jones & Nisbett, 1972) which states that "actors" (in this case, the unemployed) are more likely to give external causes for an event (unemployment) than "observers" (in this case, students, or non-unemployed people). Thus, the students in Feather's study gave more internal causes, i.e. they blamed the unemployed for their situation.

Even so, such a result has implications in times or areas of high unemployment. Firstly, it gives at least partial explanation of the dole-

bludger campaign at the very point in time when there was a sharp increase in unemployment. It also leads one to question what sort of impact the experience of unemployment will have on those young people growing up at a time when unemployment is prominent in the community and the dole-bludger stereotype is correspondingly rife. How does the experience of unemployment affect young people's view of themselves and the world, given the sorts of attitudes they are surrounded by, and presumably are adopting themselves?

These questions are particularly relevant to an area such as Mt. Druitt, which possesses one of the highest unemployed youth populations in Sydney. The corollary to the assumption about the decline in the work ethic of young people and the implication that they are "dole-bludgers", is that such a decline must be stronger in Mt. Druitt than in other areas to give rise to the high youth unemployment levels experienced there.

In addressing these issues, this study first of all seeks to investigate whether there is any evidence to support such a view. The second aim is to describe in detail the sorts of ideas Year 9 students have about work and unemployment, and to discuss the consequences of such attitudes for these young people if they must one day face and cope with unemployment themselves. Thirdly the study seeks to explore variations in beliefs and attitudes of Year 9 students due to sex, level of school achievement and social disadvantage.

METHOD

A structured interview was chosen as the method most appropriate to address the issues of concern.

Subjects

The subjects involved in the interviews were a sub-sample of the 645 Year 9 students who had participated in the Mt. Druitt Longitudinal Study (MDLS) in previous years, as well as a small number of Yr 9 students not previously involved in the study. These additional students were selected to complete the sub-sample where insufficient numbers of students were available from the MDLS sample who met the selection criteria.

Sample design

One hundred and twenty students were selected on the basis of three separate dimensions: school, gender and achievement level, in the following manner. Equal numbers of boys and girls were selected. Twenty four students were chosen from each of the three Mt. Druitt schools, as well as twenty four students from each of the two contrast schools. The characteristics of the sample school's catchment areas are shown in Table 1:

Table 1 : Characteristics of Sample Schools

School	Socio-Economic Status	Geographic Location
Mt. Druitt	Low	Outer city/semi rural
Contrast 1	High	Inner city
Contrast 2	High	Outer city/semi rural

The twenty four students from each school were selected on the basis of their performance, or level of achievement at school over the previous 18 months. A composite score was calculated for each student based on their performance on mathematics tests administered by the MDLS team in March 1986 and March 1987, and a standardized reading comprehension test administered in November 1986. The four highest scoring boys and girls from each school were then chosen and labelled 'high achievers' as well as the four lowest scoring boys and girls, 'low achievers', and the four boys and girls whose score fell closest to the mean, 'middle achievers'. Since English and Maths classes at each school are streamed, a comparison was made between each student's composite score, and his/her English and Maths class. If the composite score of a selected student appeared to be disparate with one or both of the classes he/she was in, the student was discarded from the sample, and a replacement was chosen.

It should be noted that students were selected on level of achievement relative to other Yr 9 student in their school, not relative to the entire sample.

Reserve students were also selected, in case any of the sample students were unable to be interviewed for any reason.

The sample design is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 : Sample Design

Achievement Level	HIGH		MIDDLE		LOW		TOTAL
Sex / School	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Mt. Druitt 1	4	*5	4	4	4	4	25
Mt. Druitt 2	4	4	4	4	4	4	24
Mt. Druitt 3	4	*5	4	4	4	4	25
Contrast 1	4	4	4	4	4	4	24
Contrast 2	4	4	4	4	*5	4	25
TOTAL	20	22	20	20	21	20	123
	42		40		41		

* An additional 3 students are also included in the analysis. These students belonged to the group of reserves and were initially interviewed to replace absent students in the sample, but became additional when the original students became available.

Instrument

Broad areas of interest were identified from the literature and by discussion with other researchers. These included:

Attitudes towards/beliefs about work

Attitudes towards/beliefs about unemployment

Attitudes towards/beliefs about the dole

Information and expectations about jobs/working

Influences on job choice

A list of questions was then compiled to obtain information about the above areas. A set of prompts for each question was developed for use with shy students.

A pilot run of the interviews was arranged with Year 9 students at a suburban high school similar in characteristics to the sample schools. Eight students were interviewed, with a mixture of males and females, and achievement levels. Two interviewers conducted the interviews and each made notes about which questions elicited the most information, whether students had difficulty answering any questions and which probes were successful. The types of responses obtained by each interviewer were also compared to determine whether there had been any differences in interpretation of the various items.

The interview schedule was then modified to increase the number of questions and decrease the amount of information to be elicited by each question, thereby reducing the complexity of each item and making the eventual coding of the answers easier.

A re-trial of the modified interview was run at the same school with another eight students.

A copy of the final version of the interview schedule is included in the appendix.

Procedure

The interviews were conducted early in Term 3 (July-August), 1987, over a period of 5 weeks. Two interviewers, one male and one female, were

involved and each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. Subjects were allocated to an interviewer on the basis that each interviewer should work with approximately the same number of males and females, and of high, middle and low achievers from each school. Student's responses were recorded in writing by the interviewer at the time of the interview.

Analysis of Interview Data

A preliminary coding framework was prepared on the basis of a content analysis of responses obtained during the pilot interviews. After the completion of the main interviews, ten scripts were selected at random and answers were coded according to the framework. If any categories were found to be missing, but needed for the coding of these ten, they were added, while any unnecessary categories were deleted. In one case, the categories devised for the preliminary framework were found to be inadequate to sort the ten scripts, and so a separate thirty scripts were selected and a content analysis of the answers to this item carried out to derive more appropriate categories.

A further five scripts were then drawn out at random, and were each coded according to the revised coding framework by three different coders (the two interviewers and another member of the research team), to identify any variation that may occur in coding due to the coder. Differences were discussed and resolved and the meaning of each category was clarified as a result.

Coding of the one hundred and twenty three scripts was then completed by the two interviewers, scripts being allocated according to who had carried out the interview. It was assumed that coding could be done more

accurately by the person who had been the interviewer, as there would be less likelihood of error due to interpretation.

After all interviews had been coded, an approximate tally of the total number of responses in each coding category was made for each of the coder's set of data, in order to check for any differences in coding by the two coders. Any items which manifest significant discrepancies between the two totals were then recoded using a process of collaboration.

Frequency distributions for each item were then obtained for the whole sample, as well as a breakdown by sex, school and achievement level.

Notes about the discussion

1. For many of the questions, students were allowed more than one response. Therefore, percentages (or proportions) given may total more than 100%.

2. If there is no stated effect due to school, sex or achievement level for any particular item, it may be assumed that there was no significant difference between students due to those variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Every student interviewed, except one who remained undecided, expressed a positive desire to obtain employment upon completion of his/her education. This immediately counters the argument that many young people today wish to opt out of the workforce. In fact many students were surprised to be asked such a question with responses such as "of course" or "what else would I do?" indicating that they hadn't seriously considered the idea that alternatives to working may even exist. It seemed that to nearly all students, work is a normal and desirable part of one's life, which one naturally progresses to after the completion of his/her schooling.

It became apparent that the motivating force behind this almost universal expectation of work, was twofold. Firstly, it was rooted in a desire or preference for the benefits, both material and personal, of this kind of life style. But for many students there was also a sort of morality behind the desire, a feeling that they <u>should</u> get a job, that to work was somehow the right thing to do.

WHAT'S SO GOOD ABOUT WORKING?

In spite of the fact that money, was commonly perceived as the primary reason for working, further questions made it clear that the personal benefits of working were far more important than the material benefits.

Students were first asked why they wanted to get a job after they had finished school (or college/university).

To earn money was the most frequent answer given. Three quarters of all students, regardless of whether they were male or female, which school they attended, or what level of achievement they had attained, stated that they wanted to work in order to earn money. The next most common reason, indicated by more than a third of students, was to provide them with something to do and thereby avoid boredom, laziness or idleness. Responses such as "you've got to have something to do" or "it's better than sitting at home doing nothing" were common. More girls than boys were concerned about this issue.

Just under a quarter of the students wanted to work because they expected to enjoy working and be interested in the job they planned to do. Again more girls than boys thought that enjoyment was a motivating factor. High achieving students, and students from Contrast School 1 were also more likely to give this reason.

One in five students thought that having a job would enable them to achieve a greater degree of independence. Twice as many boys as girls were concerned about this issue, and wanted to "earn my own money" and "not be dependent on other people".

Fifteen percent of students wanted to work because they believed that being on the dole was undesirable either for themselves, or for society as a whole. "If I went on the dole, I wouldn't feel good about myself", "going on the dole is hopeless" and "(working) is better than being on the dole", were just a few of the views expressed.

Other reasons for working, given by a small number of students, were to meet people, to develop skills and improve oneself, to help people, to maintain self-esteem, or because of pressures or expectations by parents, peers or society in general (e.g. "it's what everybody does", "my parents would kill me if I went on the dole".)

SHOULD EVERYBODY WORK?

Ninety four percent of all students believed that everybody should work. However just over a quarter of these qualified their answer by listing some exceptions such as sick or elderly people, or perhaps mothers with children.

There was a strong belief amongst the students that receiving the dole was bad or wrong, and the only "fair" situation was for every person to take responsibility for supporting themselves. Many students (55%) made such statements as "its not fair if some people work and some don't", "People shouldn't bludge", "everyone should help out in the country", and "People shouldn't have to support others".

Slightly more than one in five students thought that "it's not good for people to do nothing". If people didn't work, they might become bored, idle or lazy.

Other reasons given included the idea that people need to work to earn money in order to survive. This is similar to the first reason as it is obviously rooted in the belief that each individual (or family) needs to

take responsibility for his/her own life and not expect others to support them.

Of the small number of students who did not agree that everybody should have to work, most believed that people should be able to choose whether or not they wanted to work.

It appears then that this group of young people does not conform to the commonly held notion that young people today think that society owes them something and that they have the "right" to receive the dole.

WORKING VERSUS THE DOLE

In order to allow the students an opportunity to discuss how these beliefs might work out in practice, they were presented with a number of situations in which they were asked to choose between a job and the dole.

The first situation presented to the students was "If you had the choice of getting the dole or getting a job you did not like very much, which would you choose?"

Almost all students (95%), regardless of school, achievement level or sex said that they would take the job. Only 2.5% said they would choose the dole, while the other 2.5% said that it would depend on how much they disliked the job.

Just under a half of the students said that they would take the job they didn't like because "its better than doing nothing", and did not want to be "stuck at home, bored".

Almost a third would take the job because it would give them more money. Twenty nine percent of students did not want to be "dole-bludgers". Again there was the type of answer which demonstrated a general sense of what is just, "It wouldn't be fair to get the dole if I could get a job", but several responses also showed an element of personal justification, "You'd know you were doing something for your money" or "At least you'd be earning what you were getting".

A quarter of respondents thought that they would take the job so that they could gain skills and experience to equip them for a better job.

Other reasons given were to retain self-respect and to meet other people.

Again boys were more concerned about money than girls, while girls were more concerned about the possibility of boredom and idleness than boys. Girls were also more likely to consider self-development and skill-acquisition as important.

The second situation presented to the students was: "If you were offered a job you did like, but it paid less money than the dole, which would you choose, and why?" Ninety eight percent of students said they would take the job. Almost half of these would take it because they would enjoy working, while just under a third again did not like the idea of being idle and bored. Twenty nine percent hoped that the job would provide them with the skills and experience to obtain a better paid position, while another 18% didn't want to be "dole-bludgers".

Only one student, given this situation, considered money to be sufficiently important, to choose the higher paid alternative.

The third given situation was one in which it was "a job you did not like very much, and it paid less money than the dole".

Just over a half (52%) of students said they would still take the job, while 38% thought they would take the dole. The remainder of students couldn't decide, with several indicating that it would depend on how much they disliked the job and/or how much they needed the money.

Girls were more likely than boys to choose the job, as were low achieving students over middle or high achieving students. Students from Contrast School 1 chose the dole more often than students from the other schools.

Of those students who chose the job, just under a half did so in order to have something to do, rather than be idle or bored. Forty two percent said they didn't want to be dole-bludgers, while 29% wanted to use the opportunity to develop skills and gain experience in order to get a better job.

Of those students who would take the dole, just over a half said they'd rather get more money, given the situation, while 18% wanted to be available to look for other jobs, and 16% wouldn't do a job they didn't like if there wasn't sufficient money involved to make it worthwhile.

The following table gives an overall picture of the percentage of students choosing the job in various situations.

Table 3 : Percentage of students choosing job rather than dole

	Job pays less money than dole	Job pays same or more than dole
Job disliked	52%	95%
Job liked	98%	98% + (assumed)

This table illustrates that for most of the time, working is preferable to unemployment for nearly all students, and for more than half, working is always preferable under any circumstance. Only in an extreme situation would a significant number of students choose the dole, and even then, well under a half of those interviewed.

Judging by the number of students who would choose to work, even if the job paid less than the dole, money is not as strong a motivation to work as some other factors, such as enjoyment of working, or the need for some sort of occupation in life. This is confirmed by students' responses to another given situation: "If you actually didn't need to work for the money because you already had enough money (e.g. you won lotto), would you still work?"

Eighty one percent of students confirmed that they would still work, even if they didn't need the money. However, one quarter of these (20%) gave qualifications to their answer such as "only part-time though" or "I'd

have a holiday first", or "but not as hard as I would if I needed the money".

The majority of those choosing to work (67%) would do so because they didn't know of any alternative activities to occupy themselves, and feared boredom and having nothing to do.

Slightly more than a quarter would continue to work because they thought they would enjoy working, and have an interest in their chosen job.

Other reasons given for working (in order of frequency) were self-development, to earn more money, friendship, pressure from parents/peers/society, to help others and to maintain self-esteem.

Less than one in five students said that they would not work in this situation, mostly because they wouldn't need the money. Apparently these students saw the main reason for working was to earn money to live. A small number of students (3%) wouldn't work because they thought other people would need a job more than them, while a few (3%) had another preferred alternative which they would pursue if they didn't need to work.

WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT BEING UNEMPLOYED?

Several questions in the interview were designed to explore in more detail just what it is that so many students find aversive about unemployment.

When asked how they would feel if they were unemployed, two thirds of all students gave general negative feelings such as sad, depressed, down or upset.

Some students were able to state more clearly what it was about being unemployed that would upset or depress them. One third thought that they would feel worthless, like a failure, and that they were not good enough to get a job e.g. "I'd think I was not very good at anything or worth anything". Eight percent thought that they would feel rejected and that nobody wanted them, while 6% would feel like a "bludger" : "I wouldn't feel good sponging off others". 7% would feel that it wasn't their fault and that "all my hard work would be down the drain". Only a small number of students (3%) didn't expect that unemployment would have much of an impact on their view of themselves, or that it would affect them greatly. Only one student thought that it would be enjoyable being unemployed.

Students were then asked how they thought other people would react to them being unemployed.

Forty three percent of all students thought that if they were unemployed, other people would think of them as lazy or "dole-bludgers". "They'd think I was lazy and I didn't want to work". "They'd think I hadn't tried to get a job", "My friends might think I'm slack", "People who pay taxes would think I'm a dole-bludger".

Just less than one in five students thought that other people would think they were a failure, not good enough to get a job. "They'd think I was useless". "Some people would think I was no good for anything", "not up to scratch".

Another concern of several students was that other people would reject them or look down on them. "They think that you don't add up to anything if you're unemployed". "People who have jobs would look down on you". "People wouldn't like you any more because you wouldn't be able to buy good things, like a new car".

About 20% of students thought that being unemployed wouldn't affect other people's opinion of them. "They'd still treat me the same". "It wouldn't change anything". Another 16% expected that people would feel sympathy towards them and try to help and support them. "My family would stick by me and help me to find a job". "People who have lots of money would feel sorry for you". A similar number of students thought that other people would know it wasn't their fault and "they'd know you tried to get a job".

Overall, students were more likely to expect a negative reaction from other people, than to expect a sympathetic, helpful or at least a non-negative response.

When asked what they would feel like doing if they were unemployed, almost three quarters (72%) of all students interviewed said that they would not give up and would keep looking for a job. It seems that for many

students, finding a job is so important, that alternatives to achieving that goal cannot even be contemplated.

A further 16% said that as well as continuing to look, they would try to obtain part-time or lower paid employment in the interim. Nine percent of students would either go back to school, or further their education in some other way, in order to improve their employability. Only 3% of those interviewed thought that if they couldn't find a job, they would pursue leisure activities.

Seventy percent of all students interviewed knew someone who was, or who had in the past been unemployed.

Girls were more likely than boys to know an unemployed person, as were low achieving students, and students from the Mt. Druitt schools.

These differences appear to reflect the higher proportion of unemployed persons represented in these groups.

Students were then asked about their perceptions of how this unemployed person that they knew felt about being unemployed, and also how they thought other people reacted to it.

Thirty eight percent thought that the unemployed person felt sad, unhappy or depressed about it, while 10% thought that they felt either lazy, rejected or like a failure. One in ten thought that the person felt angry, that they blamed external causes and not themselves. Eighteen percent of students believed that the person either didn't care about being

unemployed (10%), or that it didn't worry them or affect them adversely (8%). Eight percent thought that the person actually enjoyed being unemployed.

With regard to how the students perceived the reaction of others to this person's unemployment, a quarter believed that there was no change of attitude, that it didn't affect other people's opinion of the person. Twelve percent thought that other people were sympathetic and supportive, while 4% believed that people didn't blame them or consider it to be their fault.

A small number of students said that other people didn't care about it. Eighteen percent of students believed that other people thought this person was a dole-bludger, while 14% thought that he/she was considered to be a failure and rejected by others.

One in ten students thought that others were either angered or saddened about the situation.

When asked what they personally thought about this unemployed person, almost a half (46%) reported that they had no change of attitude, and that they still accepted them just the same.

Twelve percent said they knew it wasn't the person's fault and that they had tried, while 10% said they felt sympathy, and tried to be helpful and supportive. Six percent were sad about it. Altogether, only 15% thought that the person was either a failure (8%) or a dole-bludger (7%).

The following tables give a summary of how students respond to the unemployment of themselves and others, and how they perceive others to respond.

Table 4 : Responding to one's own unemployment

	Person responding (as perceived by student)	
Response (%)	Self	Other person
Liked it, positive	0	8
Don't care	0	10
No change of attitude	4	8
Sad/depressed	63	38
Failure	17	2
Rejected	3	4
Dole-bludger	3	2

Table 5 : Responding to the unemployment of another

Person being responded about	Student	Other (by others)	Other (by student)
Response (%)	(How student perceived others would respond to him/her if unemployed)	(How student perceived others to to respond to someone else's unemployment)	(How student responded to someone else's unemployment)
Sympathy	8	12	10
No blame/know tried	10	4	12
No change of opinion	11	25	46
Don't care	4	5	5
Sad/depressed	7	6	6
Failure	12	8	8
Reject	6	6	0
Dole-bludger	37	18	7

From Table 4 it is apparent that students respond more negatively to their own unemployment than they perceive other people as responding to being unemployed. Similarly, from Table 5, students thought that people responded less negatively about the actual unemployment of another person than they would about the student's own unemployment. Further the students themselves were even less negative about the unemployment of another person.

It appears then that students are far more critical of their own possible unemployment than they are of someone else's actual unemployment. Also, they expect other people to react more negatively towards them as an unemployed person, than they actually see people reacting now to unemployed people, or even how they themselves now act towards unemployed people.

WHY DO PEOPLE GO ON THE DOLE?

Finally, the students were asked their opinion on why people usually went on the dole. If students gave more than one reason, they were asked which reason they thought was the most common, if any.

Just over a half of the students said that the most common reason that people took the dole was because they didn't want a job and/or were lazy. 32% gave this as the sole reason, with answers such as "They know they can get money for sitting around doing nothing", "They couldn't be bothered trying", "Some people don't want to work at all - there are plenty of jobs in the paper".

Thirty nine percent of students thought that people usually took the dole because they couldn't get a job, with 1 in 5 students stating this as

the sole reason. "Some people give up because they're sick of trying", "They can't find work because they're under-qualified for the work that's needed". "They're retrenched by technology". One in ten students thought that both reasons were equally common.

It seems then that a majority of students believe that unemployment is more often the result of an individuals own attitude or choosing, rather than the consequence of external causes, or factors outside the control of the individual. A few students mentioned in passing that they thought the government encouraged people to go on the dole, by not expecting anything in return, and they believed that either a system of working for the dole should be introduced, or that dole payments be reduced to give people incentive to find work. e.g. "The dole is too much because they're not doing anything for it". "I don't think they should get the dole - people should work for their money". And one student's final comment: "All I know is that its from the government and you don't have to do anything for it".

It appears that the students' negative response towards the dole is not based on a great deal of knowledge about the dole and its impact on the way one lives, but rather a vague notion of the "wrongness" of it, and a reluctance to be seen as fitting the "dole-bludger" image.

The students generally appeared to know very little factual information. Two thirds of all students said that they had no idea how much the dole actually was (for an 18 year old). Only one in ten students knew (within $10) how much it was, while 21% gave an incorrect estimate, in all cases, much less than the dole actually was.

However, the majority of students (82%) thought that the dole would be restrictive on their lifestyle. The main constraint was seen to be insufficient money to be able to go out and enjoy oneself. A small number of students thought that they would need to budget and would not be able to afford luxuries such as a new car or new clothes.

FINDING A JOB

Students also seem to have fairly high expectations about working and the process of obtaining employment.

In total 61% of students thought that they had a good chance of obtaining work after they had completed their education. Just under a half of these were extremely confident, and felt sure they would have no problems, while just over a half described their prospects as reasonably or moderately good compared to other people the same age. One in four thought that their chances of getting a job were about average. Only 11% expected to have problems in obtaining employment.

In an attempt to explore what it was that gave rise to this confidence, the students were asked what things they thought might help them to get a job.

Just over a half thought that their academic achievement would be of great assistance to them. Despite the fact that students were not always sure how well they would perform, many seemed to think that merely attaining HSC level would ensure increased chances of obtaining employment. This belief seems to be confirmed by the high proportion of students (69%) who stated their intention to complete Year 12. More high achieving

students than low achievers believed that performance at school would be a help.

Twenty nine percent believed that possessing skills and experience relevant to their chosen work would aid them to get a job.

Personal attributes such as being a hard worker, having a positive attitude or demonstrating confidence and enthusiasm were seen to be assets by one in four students, more often high achievers than low achievers. Low achieving students were more inclined to believe that a high availability of jobs would be helpful to them, as well as good presentation or appearance at the interview. When asked what things might contribute towards difficulty in obtaining employment, 1 in 4 students could not think of anything that would hinder them in finding work.

Twenty eight percent thought that the major hindrance might be a lack of jobs, while just less than a quarter of students believed that failure to obtain the HSC, or to perform well at school, might cause them problems.

Other hindrances mentioned by students were a lack of skills and experience, poor attitude and low confidence.

The students, then, generally demonstrated a great deal of confidence about obtaining employment, and overall seemed quite positive about the prospect of working.

When asked what things they would like about working, just over a half of the students expressed a positive interest in the type of work they were

thinking of, and believed that they would enjoy working in that field. One in five students were looking forward to meeting people and making new friends.

A few students wanted to be able to help other people and believed that they would be able to do this in the work they had chosen, while some thought that the job they had in mind would allow them to produce or make something tangible, "to have something to show for what you have done".

Other positive aspects of working, or of a particular job, given by less than 10% of students were variety, creativity, pleasant surrounding, the financial rewards, and the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge.

Students were then requested to indicate some of the things they would dislike about working, or about the job they had selected.

About half the students believed that there was nothing that they would not like or enjoy about working, or could not think of anything they would dislike.

Twelve percent of students thought that they might not like the time commitment required ie. the number of hours involved. Six percent were concerned that there would be a lot of hard work and study required in order to enter the field they were interested in. Other aspects disliked by students were physical dangers or risks, the impact the job might have on one's lifestyle, and disagreeable surroundings.

CONCLUSIONS

In all these results, the Mt. Druitt students appear to differ very little from their counterparts in the Contrast Schools. This would indicate that teenagers from Western Sydney place just as much value on work, and are just as willing to work, as teenagers from other parts of Sydney. In fact, in one of the few questions where differences did occur between the schools, the Mt. Druitt students demonstrated higher work motivation than the students from contrast school 1, that is, they were more likely to choose a poorly paid job they didn't like over the dole, than were the students from contrast school 1. This result clearly fails to support the hypothesis that the decline in the work ethic is stronger in Mt. Druitt than other areas to give rise to the high levels of youth unemployment there.

In contrast to the image of young people and their attitude to work commonly presented by the media, the Year 9 students in this study demonstrate high motivation to obtain employment after the completion of their schooling, and have high expectations of success. The results suggest that such a motivation is rooted predominantly in a need to be occupied and a corresponding desire to escape boredom, with students finding it difficult to conceive of alternative activities, as well as a strong disapproval of "dole-bludging".

Students' responses in the interview indicate that the attitudes held about unemployment and the dole tend to be more extreme than might be expected in the light of their encounters with unemployed people.

Specifically, these young people expect to feel greater depression, unhappiness and sense of failure if unemployed than they actually perceive unemployed people to be experiencing in reality. Further, they expect other people to be more likely to think of them as dole-bludgers and failures, and less likely to be sympathetic and accepting, than they see this being the attitude towards unemployed people in reality, or indeed than they themselves view unemployed people.

With regards to the dole and consistent with the actor-observer effect in attribution theory, the students perceive that the main reason that people take the dole is that they don't want to work. This is in spite of the fact that only one student in all those interviewed did not express a positive desire to work after completing school, and that to most, work is so important, that to give up searching for a job in the face of unemployment is inconceivable.

In addition, the students expect that to live on the dole would be a difficult experience and very restrictive on their lifestyle, even though they possess little factual knowledge about the financial aspects of being unemployed.

All this suggests that, beyond the students' actual experiences and knowledge of unemployment and the dole, there is something else operating which contributes to an increased negative perception of unemployment and the dole, and a corresponding and heightened motivation to work. It is likely that the recent high levels of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, accompanied by the dole-bludger stereotype promoted by the media and accepted by a large proportion of the population, may be

fulfilling such a role. As Bright and Wilkes (1980) found, "the impact of high rates of youth unemployment has been conducive to promoting strong work motivation tendencies in the large majority of students".

It seems then, that public fears about the decline in young people's attitudes towards work are unfounded. The students in the study appear to be faithfully perpetuating the same traditional work ethic that has been characteristic of our western culture for many years, and as yet show no signs of relinquishing it.

Such a negative view of unemployment and the dole, and such a positive view of work, give some cause for concern, however, when coupled with the fact that these young people hold higher expectations of obtaining employment than the reality of the unemployment situation suggests is warranted. Nearly all the students are expressing a strong need to find work, and yet unemployment figures indicate that many will experience at least temporary unemployment upon leaving school, with about one in five becoming unemployed for longer periods of time.*

Various studies suggest that young people with high expectations about work are most seriously affected by unemployment because of the discrepancy experienced between their actual situation and their beliefs and values (Doring, 1984; Furnham, 1984).

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*Australian Bureau of Statistics figures for May, 1987 show the unemployment rate for 15-19 year olds in Western Sydney to be 21%. Figures in February tend to be much higher, up to 26%, illustrating an increase in the short-term unemployed at the beginning of each year.

The attitudes and beliefs demonstrated by the students in this study, will almost certainly ensure serious consequences for the self-esteem and motivation of the 21% who must inevitably face unemployment.

If the solution can not be found in the improvement of job opportunities for young people and if we are to accept that youth unemployment will be with us for some time yet, the challenge which faces schools in Western Sydney, then, is to determine the optimum way to prepare students for such a situation. It is difficult to know whether educating students toward understanding the realities of unemployment will result in benefitting them or disadvantaging them. On the one hand, if students have a clear grasp of the realities of the future, and are trained in strategies to deal with the difficulties they must face, perhaps they will be better equipped to cope. Students may need to learn ways of filling in their spare time, if they are to avoid the boredom and idleness that they so fear, and they must develop strategies for maintaining self-esteem that are not based on the belief that work is the only activity in life which provides a person with worth and dignity. Another significant help would be to work towards dispelling the myth that young unemployed people are "dole-bludgers". However, care must be taken to ensure that in clarifying reality, students do not lose the motivation and enthusiasm which surely must serve to enhance their opportunities, when they begin to understand the real possibility of unemployment.

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APPENDIX

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

WORK BELIEFS INTERVIEW 1987

Name: _____

School: _____

1.1 Do you want to get a job when you leave school, or after you finish studying? What sort of job?

_____

1.2 Why do you intend to/want to work?

_____

_____

_____

1.3 Is this the same reason that most other people work? (If no, why do others work?)

_____

_____

1.4 Do you think everybody should work? Why/why not?

_____

_____

_____

If no to first question:

1.5 Why not?

_____

_____

1.6 Why do you think other people choose to work?

_____

_____

_____

You said you'd like to work as/in .....

2.1 How did you get the idea to do this job?

2.2 What things have you found out about this job since then?

2.3 How did you find out these things?

2.4 Do you know what you have to do to get this sort of job?
What qualifications and skills do you need?

2.5 What would you like about this job? What made you decide on this job?

2.6 Is there anything you'd dislike about it?

2.7 How sure are you that this is the sort of job you want?

2.8 If yes: What makes you sure?

_____

_____

_____

2.9 If no: What things would you need to know or consider before you could be sure?

_____

_____

_____

2.10 How many jobs have you considered? What are they?

_____

_____

_____

3.1 What do you think your chances are of getting your preferred job when you leave school? (or getting a job you'd like)

Probe: Will you be able to choose the job you'd most like, or will you have to take whatever you can get?

_____

_____

3.2 What things would make it easy for you?

_____

_____

3.3 What things might make it difficult for you?

_____

_____

4.1 What things that you learn at school will help you to get a job when you leave school?

4.2 Are there things other than academic skills that would help you to get a job and to do the job?
What other things do you need to know to get a job?

4.3 Do you learn everything that you need to know about jobs at school?

4.4 What things don't you learn at school?

5.1 If all your efforts to get a job failed, and you were unemployed, what would be your main feeling or thought?

5.2 What would other people feel and think about you? Who are you thinking of when you answer?

5.3 What would you feel like doing?

5.4 Do you know somebody who is/has been unemployed?

5.5 What feelings or thoughts did they have about being unemployed?

5.6 What did/do other people think of them? Who thinks that?

5.7 What did/do you think of them?

6.1 Assuming you were eligible for the dole, and you had the choice of getting the dole or getting a job you did not like very much, which would you choose?

_____

6.2 What would be better about the dole/the job?

_____

_____

_____

6.3 (If chose job: What if the job paid less than the dole? Why?)

_____

_____

_____

6.4 What if you were offered a job you did like, but it paid less than the dole? Which would you choose and why?

_____

_____

_____

7.1 If you actually didn't need to work for the money because you already had enough money (e.g. you won the lottery), would you still work? Why/why not?

_____

_____

_____

7.2 If no, what would you do instead of working?

_____

_____

8.1 Do you know how much the dole is for 18 years olds?

_____

8.2 Do you think this (or the dole) is too much, not enough, or just the right amount?

_____

_____

_____

8.3 Is it enough to live on for an 18 year old?

Probe: What about for people who don't live with their family and have to support themselves?

_____

_____

_____

8.4 Would it restrict your lifestyle very much if you were living on the dole. What things might you not be able to do?

_____

_____

_____

8.5 Why do you think people usually go on the dole?

_____

_____

_____

_____

8.6 How will cutting out the dole for under 18 year olds affect you personally.
Probe: Will you stay at school longer?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. If you wanted to talk about jobs, your plans for the future, and what it is like to be in the workforce, which one person would you be most likely to choose to talk to?

_____

_____

10. How much have you found out about jobs, and what it is like to work from the following sources?

	A lot	Some	Nothing/ not much
Mother			
Father			
Brother/sister/cousin (who?)			
Friend/s			
Teacher/s			
Careers Adviser			
Another adult friend/relative (who?)			
Other person (who?)			
Books/magazines/pamphlets			
TV (which program)			
Radio (which program)			
Movies or videos (which ones)			
Other ways?			

11. You mentioned that you found out a lot from .....
What sorts of things have you found out from them?

a) _____

_____

b) _____

_____

d) _____

_____

d) _____

_____

_____

12. Which of the following jobs would you possibly consider and which do you feel you would not ever consider doing at all?

If there are any jobs you haven't heard of, or don't know about, I have a list of definitions, but only ask if you really have no idea.

	Might consider	Don't know	Would never consider
High School Teacher			
Motor Mechanic			
Bus Driver			
Shorthand Typist			
Journalist			
Miner			
Social Worker			
Dentist			
Hairdresser			
Police Force			
Computer Programmer			
Primary School Teacher			
Bank Teller			
Nursing Aide			
Law Court Judge			
Truck Driver			
Filing Clerk			
Gardener			

13. Which of these jobs do you think are equally appropriate for males and females, which are more appropriate for females and which for males? Only say "can't decide" if you really have no idea at all.

	More appropriate for females	Equally appropriate for both	More appropriate for males	Can't decide
High School Teacher				
Motor Mechanic				
Bus Driver				
Shorthand Typist				
Journalist				
Miner				
Social Worker				
Dentist				
Hairdresser				
Police Force				
Computer Programmer				
Primary School Teacher				
Bank Teller				
Nursing Aide				
Law Court Judge				
Truck Driver				
Filing Clerk				
Gardener				

14. **Select five items randomly from the Student's WAPS answer sheet and readminister those items. Discuss the item and answer to ascertain degree of understanding.**

WAPS Item Number	Meaning Understood

High School Teacher:

A person who teaches in a high school.

Motor Mechanic:

A person who fixes car engines.

Bus Driver:

A person who drives a bus.

Shorthand Typist:

A person who takes notes in shorthand and types them up.

Journalist:

A person who writes news stories for newspapers, magazines, and for news and current affairs programs on television and radio.

Miner:

A person who digs in mines.

Social Workers:

A person who helps people who have problems.

Dentist:

A person who looks after people's teeth.

Hairdresser:

A person who cuts and styles people's hair.

Police Force:

A person who protects the public and makes sure laws are obeyed.

Computer Programmer:

A person who tells a computer how to do something e.g. makes up computer games.

Primary School Teacher:

A person who teaches in a primary school

Bank Teller:

A person who works at the counter in a bank and looks after withdrawals and deposits.

Nursing Aide:

A person who helps a nurse, e.g. makes beds, washes patients.

Law Court Judge:

A person who runs a trial in a court and gives out sentences.

Truck Driver:

A person who drives a truck.

Filing Clerk:

A person who puts away and gets out letters, documents, and other information in an office.

Gardener:

A person who looks after trees, flowers and lawns in gardens and grounds.